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JOHN GUMMERE.

HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MEMORIALS

OF

THE LIFE AND CHARACTER

OF

JOHN GUMMERE.

BY WM. J. ALLINSON.

An unlooked for dispensation of Providence has created a deep sensation in many hearts. An intelligent existence has been translated out of Time—but he has not "passed away like a shadow—or as a post that passeth by—or as when a bird hath flown through the air and there is no token of her way to be found"—nor is his memory on earth, "as the remembrance of a guest that tarrieth but a day." The wisest of mere men has said, "to be allied unto Wisdom is immortality." And again he says, "by the means of her I shall obtain immortality, and *leave behind me* an everlasting memorial to them that come after me." Neither is the grief which attends his departure from this present world, confined to the poignant anguish of a large and affectionate family circle, whose wound can only be alleviated by the most merciful hand which inflicted it; nor to the youths who, while they revered him as their Preceptor, honoured him as a Father; nor to the particular community in the midst of whom, the pale but to him enchanting angel of death, found him with his lamp trimmed and burning. A teacher for more than 40 years, he had, in one sense, children from nearly all the States in this Union, and from "isles afar off"—and these have gone forth into the wide world to fulfil their destiny, enriched and ennobled by his wisdom and his counsels. Many of them had been, for numerous successive years, far from their kindred, regarding him as a kind and faithful parent, dependant on his care, and some of them on his bounty, and such was the filial confidence which he uniformly inspired, that it may well be doubted whether there were any among all his disciples, in whom love to him did not amount to a principle, and almost to a passion. When

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they had grown from the dependence of children and pupils, to the equality which manhood gives, and had entered into competition with him as intellectual existences, the affection and reverence of the boy, had ripened and deepened into that abiding respect which is the permanent and willing tribute paid to wisdom and worth. They have twined his memory around their hearts,—they have taught his name to their children; many of them have followed to the grave his mortal remains, and, as the winged messengers of the public press convey to their respective and widely scattered abodes, the information that his kindly heart has ceased to beat, and his lips to utter wisdom, their eyes will be moistened, their hearts will be saddened with a sense of bereavement, at the extinguishment of the cherished hope, to feel once more the dear pressure of his hand, and to see lighted for themselves once more his smile of welcome greeting, illuminated by a heart which was a stranger to insincerity.

Nor does the sensation rest here. He was valued and honored by that class, whom an elegant writer calls "the elect spirits of the age—whose verdict is prophecy, and whose applause is fame." The gifted minds with whom such as these can commune, relative to matters of high learning and science, "the beginning, ending, and the midst of times; the alterations of the turnings of the sun, the change of seasons, the circuits of years, and the positions of stars;" are comparatively few, and the departure of one of these, though beautiful as the going down of the world's luminary, is mourned by those who, dwelling in heights to which mere wealth or rank could no more find access, than could a camel through a needle's eye, are "privy to the mysteries of the knowledge of God and lovers of his works."

A Christian Church, moreover, has suffered bereavement, by his removal to the Church triumphant, in whose beatified assembly, we have humble but full confidence, he will stand, with harp, and golden vial full of odors, redeemed forever—joining in the song which no mortal could learn.

Such, and so general is the loss sustained. For the deceased, his pains are ended—he has received his consolation—"his record is on high"—and he needs not our praise. The voice of Flattery would be most inappropriately applied to one

who was so humble, so unobtrusive. Yet, though we rear no marble monument to mark the spot where his dust returns to its elements; as he was no ordinary man, it is meet that some written memorial should tell of his attainments and his virtues, for there may be instruction even in a cursory notice of his course through life, and the means by which he attained to honorable usefulness.

John Gummere was born near Willow Grove, Pennsylvania, in the year 1784, with none of those external advantages which give a pledge of distinction. His parents were pious, industrious, but poor. He had no other opportunities of education than those afforded by the most common country schools, at a time when these schools were far below their present standard, a standard which, we may safely say, he has materially aided in elevating. Rarely was any thing more attempted in them, than the acquirement of Reading, Writing and Arithmetic, and in these branches only he received instruction till the age of 19. Yet at quite an early age he had fully mastered Arithmetic; and it should be here noted, that his father was a very remarkable Arithmetician, and could solve any problem which could be solved by mere Arithmetic, —beyond which he had never gone. At an early age, (perhaps 13 years) he commenced, by himself, the study of Mathematics, and, without any other aid than that of books, made himself master of Algebra, Mensuration, Geometry, Trigonometry, Surveying and practical Astronomy. When 19 years old, he commenced his life time career in the important avocation of a teacher, by accepting the care of a country school at Horsham, Pa. After teaching six or nine months, he went as pupil to Friends' Boarding School at West Town, and was six months under the tuition of Enoch Lewis, for whom he always cherished sentiments of respect and affection. He then went to Rancocas, in Burlington county, New Jersey, where he taught a school about six years, during which time he married. In the year 1811 he went to West Town as a Teacher; where the many excellent traits of his character were usefully developed, and where, during his tarriance of three years, his services were highly appreciated. In the spring of 1814, he opened his Boarding School in Burlington. A teacher of the right stamp ranks high as a philanthropist, and pursues his im-

portant calling from other than mercenary motives. In the carrying on of this establishment, he was utterly regardless of pains or expense, when the benefit of those placed under his care was to be promoted; and the writer of this notice has known of instances of pupils whom he has schooled, lodged and clothed, for years after he had found that there was no prospect of remuneration. Truly then may we say, that this school was successful, when we know that the advancement of learning and the benefit of those confided to his care, formed so large a part of his disinterested motive. No better institution of the kind was to be found in the country, and it was patronized by parents in most of the United States, and in a number of the West India Islands. Whilst it is not intended to enter into the minutiæ of his private history, one anecdote may here be inserted, as illustrative of his character. Conceiving that a benefit would result from regular courses of lectures on Natural Philosophy and Chemistry, he proposed that his brother, who had joined him in the School, should take the latter, while he would take the former branch of Science. His brother replied that he had never opened a work on Chemistry. "Neither have I," said he, "on Natural Philosophy." It was then objected that they could not obtain the appropriate instruments and apparatus in this country—"But we can get them," said he, "from London." It was suggested that they might fail in so making themselves masters of their respective subjects as to pursue them advantageously. "But we shall not fail," said he—"only determine, and the thing is half done." An order was sent to London for apparatus, both Philosophical and Chemical, a better supply of which was provided for his Institution (at an expense of several thousand dollars,) than was to be found in any private Institution in the country.—The result of this laudable effort is well known to the class for whom, mainly, this sketch is written—those who have been the pupils of our departed preceptor and friend. These are aware that the lectures of the two brothers on the above named branches of Science, were eminently calculated to excite, and, so far as they went, to satisfy, a laudable thirst for useful knowledge. And, although not thrown open to the public, these lectures were often resorted to by intelligent citizens, who found profit combined with rational pleasure, in availing themselves of the courtesy which was never withheld.

His school was remarkably well drilled—and kept in order without any severity. His power over his pupils was absolute, because he ruled alike the judgment and the affections. So strong was the sentiment of affection (which we have already described as amounting almost to a passion) that he was repeatedly known to quell disaffection by the moral power of a grieved look.

Before he reached the age of 25 years, his reputation as a scholar was well established; and he enjoyed the correspondence of Robert Adrain, Nathaniel Bowditch, and others of the most prominent Mathematicians of the day. He continued rapidly increasing his stock of mathematical knowledge, up to the age of 40 or 45; by which time he confessedly ranked among the most prominent Mathematicians of America. Nor were his acquirements confined to Mathematics. He had made himself master of the French language, and was thus enabled to read all the prominent French Mathematical writers. Later in life he made himself acquainted with the German, thus obtaining access to much that was valuable in Science, and was a subscriber to several scientific periodicals in that language. He also became well versed in Natural Philosophy, and physical science generally, and his attainments in general literature were respectable.

Yet all his acquirements were made in the midst of most arduous duties, as the head of a large Boarding School establishment, duties which were never neglected. He had acquired the habit of attention and self-abstraction. His character combined remarkable modesty, with the most unbounded energy and perseverance. He was never appalled by the appearance of labour or difficulties ahead, or deterred by indolence or doubts of success, from pursuing any object which he thought it desirable to accomplish. He could see no difficulty in the way when he perceived that any knowledge was desirable to be acquired for the benefit of his school.

He was for 31 years a member of the American Philosophical Society, and some valuable papers on Astronomical subjects contributed by him, are preserved in its "Transactions." He was also a member of the Philadelphia Academy of Arts and Sciences. As illustrating the estimation in which his mathematical acquirements were held, it may be mentioned

that he was at one time solicited to accept the chair of Mathematics in the University of Pennsylvania; but this honour, though accompanied by the offer of a liberal compensation, he decided after mature deliberation to decline.

In the year 1825 the degree of Master of Arts was conferred upon him by the New Jersey College at Princeton. His well known treatise on the subject of Surveying was first published in 1814, and has run through fourteen large editions, and is now stereotyped. It is certainly more extensively known, and more highly valued, than any other work on Surveying.

His Treatise on theoretical and practical Astronomy, is also a work of high merit. It has passed through three editions, but is not so universally known as "Gummere's Surveying;" the Science of Astronomy, sublime and important as it is, being less familiar to *the many* in this utilitarian world, who apply to high Science the test question "*what is the use*," and are too apt to reject as impractical, those branches which do not to their vision appear *evidently* subservient to the sordid object of their lives, the acquisition of money. These are, and must be, strangers to the serene enjoyment of those, who, with him whose memory we now pensively commemorate, inhale the *upper air*, from classic heights inaccessible to political ambition, in "green pastures" unknown to the worldling's busy tread, and beside "still wafers" never ruffled by the strife of tongues. So just was the sentiment of Solomon when he declared that he would *repose himself* with Wisdom,—"*for her conversation hath no bitterness.*"

It may be added that the last named Treatise (the use of which has been within a few years generally extending) is employed as the text book in the Military Academy at West Point, and others of the best scientific Institutions in the country. In the clearness of its explanations, and in the rigid attention to accuracy which is observable throughout the volume, there is evidence that the author had profited by those models of rigorous exactness, the works of Lacroix, Delambre, Lagrange, La Place, &c. It was characterised by an eminent Professor in a notice of the second edition, as "the only American work affording the means for actually performing Astronomical calculation." In the latest edition, published but a few years since, a great part of the work was re-written.

In both these works he has shown, in the composition of the rules &c., his peculiar faculty for adapting himself to the comprehension of all. And in his oral as well as written instructions, he avoided the too common error of over-estimating the supposed attainments of the pupil.

At the establishment of Friends' College at Haverford, in 1833, his weight of character rendered his services desirable; and during ten years, in the Mathematical department, and most of that time as Principal also, he sustained much of the weight of that superior Institution. Here, as during his whole life, he exhibited unremitting faithfulness in the performance of arduous and responsible duties. Retiring from Haverford with an impaired constitution, he resumed his establishment in Burlington in connection with his eldest son Samuel J. Gummere, who is his worthy successor, both in scientific attainments and in the happy talent of imparting instruction. Less than this, (though eulogy of the living forms no part of our object) it were injustice to say, nor ought we to omit expressing the conviction, that the Institution is still altogether deserving of the high reputation which it has sustained.

He was a man of sound discriminating judgment, of peculiar sensibility, and amiable to an unusual degree, combining a rational economy with great liberality of feeling and action. These traits were beautifully though unobtrusively manifested, in his domestic and social intercourse. He was a good and useful citizen, never opposing private interest against public benefit.

The language of the Apostle James applied to him, will place his character in just and beautiful relief. "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man." One remarkable trait in his character, is worthy of being held prominently in view as an example to all. It is testified of him, by those who knew him most intimately through life, that they never heard him, throughout his manhood, speak evil or slightingly of any one. And, such was his tenderness of the reputation of others, that he rarely heard an individual spoken harshly of without putting in some caveat—mentioning some good trait, if the person alluded to was known to him. At other times his disapproval was effectually expressed by a look which silenced the tongue of slander. If a person incurred

his disapprobation, his course was, either to lodge the feeling in his own breast, or to seek in private, with christian mildness, and by arguments amounting to demonstration, to show wherein had consisted a departure from right principle.

To those who knew him best, a beautiful picture is presented on a calm review of his life. In his daily walk were illustrated well, the christian virtues and the kindred christian graces. He was an exemplary and useful member of the Society of Friends, and was a firm believer in the Divine mission of him of whom he was a humble follower. Theoretically sound in christian faith, he by no means rested in the mere assent of his understanding to orthodox doctrines. Making little profession in words, his christianity was *acted out*, and his faith was one

"in daily striving
And *performance* shewn."

Let it be remembered by those who revered him, that his life was spent in the observance of daily devotion, and a daily settlement of his soul's accounts with "the God of the spirits of all flesh." And indeed, how else but by near access to the throne of Grace, could he have so held in subjection the unruly member which "no man can tame," and have so regulated his conduct by the Divine principle of the golden rule?

Near his close he testified that the important work of preparation for the solemn change, had not been left till then—and, being thus at peace with his Maker, his spirit was clothed with beautiful serenity, when the shades of life's evening closed upon him. During the last day of his life, his countenance beamed with the cheerfulness of a soul "kept in perfect peace," and it was observed that he always spoke with a smile. And, when death was upon him, he employed his latest powers of voice, in imparting pious counsel to his immediate relatives, confessing unequivocally his faith in the Saviour and Redeemer of men, and his sole dependence on His merits.

He "put off mortality" on the 31st of 5th Month (May) 1845—in the 61st year of his age.

His life presents in various respects an instructive example. Let us rise from the contemplation of it, impressed with a self-application of the injunction, "Go thou and do likewise."

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An eye that waked while others slept, in deep repose is sleeping ;—
The heart a reverent watch which kept, a sabbath now is keeping :—
A soul that loved his Maker's law, now stands redeemed before him,
"Day without night" to serve and praise, while countless years roll o'er him.
The tongue from which abstrusest lore was heard in kindliest tone,
Tunes the "new song" which Seraphs love, on Earth unheard, unknown.
He watched the dazzling orbs which take their glorious march thro' space,
And noted well the smallest star which left its wonted place ;
The three-fold loss of Hercules, Orion, Perseus, Pisis,
The appalling sweep from Cancer's train, Hydra, and Berenicis ,
And shall we see from Friendship's group, from Learning's constellation,
A star of beauty so serene forever leave its station,
Nor breathe a sigh, nor shed a tear, nor trace memorial fond,
To tell his course on this side death, and shew his hope beyond ?
Yet vain and needless the attempt !—when Earth's memorials perish,
The Record Book before the Throne his memory shall cherish.
And there, with glowing Seraph throngs in firm and blest alliance,
He looks into the mysteries of higher, holier Science.
And shall we mourn his transit bright to fadeless joys elysian,
Transplanted from the horoscope which bounds our feeble vision,
And added to the firmament more close around the Throne,
And clustered with the stars of morn, whom Christ hath made his own ?